

## **EASTLAKE HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED GATORADE CALIFORNIA GIRLS CROSS COUNTRY PLAYER OF THE YEAR**

CHICAGO (January 21, 2026) — In its 41<sup>st</sup> year celebrating the nation's best high school athletes, Gatorade today announced Jaelyn Williams of Eastlake High School is the 2025-26 Gatorade California Girls Cross Country Player of the Year.

Gatorade Player of the Year is the top honor in high school sports, celebrating the nation's best high school athletes for their excellence in sport, academics and community. The award recognizes Williams as California's best high school girls cross country athlete, and she joins an elite legacy that spans professional athletes and coaches to CEOs, such as Jordan Hasay (2008-09, Mission College Preparatory Catholic High School, CA), Katelyn Tuohy (2017-18, 2018-19 & 2019-20, North Rockland High School, NY) and Jane Hedengren (2024-25, Timpview High School, UT).

The 5-foot-5 senior won the CIF Division I state meet this past season with a time of 16:28.0, breaking the divisional record previously held by two-time Nike Cross Nationals champion Sarah Baxter by 12 seconds. Williams also became California's first single-season double All-American in history. She concluded her prep distance career as a three-time Division I All-State honoree.

Williams has volunteered locally at Corpus Christi Catholic Church as an altar server, a young apostle and as a leader at church youth camps. She has also donated her time assisting at Sweetwater Unified School District's middle school cross country and track and field meets. "Jaelyn Williams demonstrated unprecedented dominance down the stretch," said Rich Gonzalez of PrepCalTrack. "She became the first Golden State talent in history to break five minutes in the final mile of the state meet course (4:58.1), riding that momentum to smash the Division I meet record. She then earned third place at each of the season's premier national championship races. Her double-bronze performance netted her All-American honors at both events, closing out her prep career as the state's most decorated national racer in 2025 with an incredible four All-American finishes in her prep career."

Williams has maintained a weighted 4.63 GPA in the classroom. She has signed a written letter of athletic aid to run at Stanford University this fall.

The [Gatorade Player of the Year](#) program annually recognizes one state winner from each of the 50 states and Washington D.C., in 12 different sports: football, girls volleyball, boys and girls cross country, boys and girls basketball, baseball, softball, boys and girls soccer, and boys and girls track & field. In total, 610 high school athletes are honored each year. From the pool of state winners, one national winner is selected in each of the 12 sports. The selection process is administered by the Gatorade Player of the Year Selection Committee, which leverages experts including coaches, scouts, media and others as sources to help evaluate and determine the winners in each sport.

As part of Gatorade's commitment to breaking down barriers in sport, every Player of the Year also receives a grant to donate to a social impact partner. To date, the Gatorade Player of the Year program has provided more than \$6.4 million in grants to winners across more than 2,200 organizations.

To learn more about the Gatorade Player of the Year program, check out past winners or to nominate student-athletes, visit [playeroftheyear.gatorade.com](http://playeroftheyear.gatorade.com) or follow us on social media on Instagram at [instagram.com/Gatorade](https://www.instagram.com/Gatorade), Facebook at [facebook.com/GatoradePOY](https://www.facebook.com/GatoradePOY) and X(Twitter) at [x.com/Gatorade](https://www.x.com/Gatorade).

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